responders, a very important, top priority for homeland security.

We must do all that work now, this year, before Christmas, before we leave. The way we get this work done is to have these important votes. Every Member of the Senate will be free to vote for or against. Every Member of the Senate will be free to vote as their conscience deems they should on all of these procedural matters.

Again, Senator REID has voted for all these procedures in the past. Let's be clear about that. So I urge us to put the politics aside, to not make this yet another Washington partisan political fight. Far too much is at stake for us to do that. Far too much in my State of Louisiana. Far too much in the devastated State of Mississippi and Alabama and Florida, with Wilma, and Texas with Rita, and southwest Louisiana with Rita.

If there is ever a time for us to look at the substance and the national good and not Washington politics, it is now. That is what people sent us here to do, not play these partisan games. I urge everyone to put that substance first, to put the American people first, to put the people of the devastated regions of the gulf coast first and have these votes and pass this crucial package of relief.

Let me be clear. ANWR is directly related to this relief because significant revenues from ANWR would go to the devastated region for crucial needs in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, and Florida. That is very much a part of this hurricane package.

Let me close as I began, by thanking the chairman of Appropriations, Senator COCHRAN, and Senator STEVENS, the chairman of the committee on which I am proud to serve, the Commerce Committee, for their vital leadership, for their vital work. But for them, we would not be in this moment of huge opportunity to meet the crucial needs of the still suffering citizens of the gulf coast.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

HURRICANE RELIEF

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I commend the distinguished Senator from Louisiana for his eloquent statement about the importance of this legislation. He has been a true leader in this effort to craft a bill that will provide money now, needed desperately by the victims of these disasters in the Gulf Coast States. He and his colleague, Ms. LANDRIEU, have been very active, as all Senators know, in describing in detail the dilemma that is faced by local governments, municipal governments, and county and parish governments in the region. Our State governments have been stressed beyond imagination in terms of trying to make resources available to help save lives, to help rescue victims, to help communities that are struggling to repair and replace

damaged and destroyed infrastructure such as water and sewer systems, highways and roads and bridges. The list is almost endless of the challenges that have been faced by the people of this region.

But the Senator from Louisiana has been, more than anybody I know, on a daily basis working his heart out and trying his best to be sure that we respond in the way that we should as a Federal Government, to provide the assistance needed for a full and real recovery from these disasters.

I also think about my colleague, Senator LOTT from Mississippi, and Congressman TAYLOR in the House, who both lost their houses and suffered real, serious personal losses as a result of Hurricane Katrina. They have been tirelessly and constantly in touch with the situation as victims of this disaster but at the same time lending their energies, their imagination, their knowhow, their leadership to provide guidance and suggestions all along the way.

This is not the last bill we are going to see on the subject of disaster assistance, but it is the most important because it provides real money at once. It is made available immediately upon passage for distribution to those who need the help the most. And it is urgent.

If we delay and get tangled up in a lot of parliamentary maneuvering, criticism, second-guessing, and partisan infighting, whatever kind of resistance to this important appropriations bill, it will be a disgrace. It will be a disgrace to the Congress and an injustice to the victims of this disaster.

There are a lot of people we could talk about this morning—State government leaders. Our Governor, Haley Barbour, has been up here for days answering questions, providing information, making suggestions of alternatives that would be appropriate for the Federal Government to undertake to help the recovery, and identifying ways State governments can share in the responsibility. The Community Development Block Grant Program is one of the suggestions Governor Barbour made as a conduit for funds to help rebuild communities and help landowners who have been harmed and who were outside the flood plain, didn't have flood insurance, yet they were flooded and didn't have coverage to pay for those losses and those damages. He is looking for ways to help everybody who needs help and who deserves help from their Government.

This bill provides this substantial amount of money and commitment from our Government at a time when it is truly needed. I am hopeful the Senate will act with dispatch and send this conference report to the President for his signature.

Leadership in the House and in the Appropriations Committee, the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, has also been very important and crucial to this undertaking. The Speaker of the House, personally, and the whip,

Roy Blunt from Missouri, have been personally engaged in trying to find ways to reach an accommodation with the Senate and with the States affected. They have done a wonderful job. It has culminated in the presentation of this conference report.

The Congressman from California, JERRY LEWIS, chairman of the full committee in the other body, and Congressman BILL YOUNG from Florida, who has had experiences with other disasters in the past, have been very helpful in remembering how we responded to past challenges—Hurricane Dennis, I recall—and there are others that Florida has experienced. But everybody coming together and doing their best to sort through the challenges, identify ways to help, has culminated in the presentation to the Senate of this conference report. I am hopeful we will respond.

As Senator VITTER said, everybody has an opportunity to vote to help us recover. We hope you will. It is a bipartisan effort. Democrats and Republicans have both been involved, from both sides of the aisle here in the Senate and in the House as well.

We hope we will act quickly in response to the suggestions made by leadership here in the Senate and approve this conference report. We are deeply grateful to all who have been helpful, who have come up here, stayed and talked and explained what the facts are, who testified before committees.

We have reviewed all the facts. We know what the situation is. Now it is time to act, and act is what the Senate should do now.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, in the past in this body, I have been highly critical of some of the things that have gone on in the appropriations process. But I want to say the chairman of the Appropriations Committee in this body, with the appropriations package we are going to look at today, or whenever we get to it, has done a phenomenal job. I think the American people need to know this is the type of leadership we have been looking for for a long time.

All of the additional spending for the victims of the hurricane, for LIHEAP, for all of the additional things we are going to be doing, has been paid for not on the backs of our children and our grandchildren but in fact by making hard decisions on what to trim.

A lot of resistance is probably going to come with this, and the reason people are uncomfortable with it is because we are trimming the size of the